Now You See Them, Now You Don't. Françoise Caumartin. Trans. David Homel. Scholastic Canada, 1990 and 1993. 24 pages, $5.95 paper. ISBN 0-590-74035-0. **Mr. Patapoum's First Trip.** Gilles Tibo. Illus. François Vaillancourt. Trans. Sarah Swartz. Annick Press, 1993. 36 pages, $5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-294-7. **Wait and See.** Robert Munsch. Illus. Michael Martchenko. Annick Press, 1993. 24 pages, $4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-334-X. **Sleep Tight, Mrs. Ming.** Sharon Jennings. Illus. Mireille Levert. Annick Press, 1993. 28 pages, $5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-325-0. **Long Nellie.** Deborah Turney-Zagwyn. Orca Books, 1993. 32 pages, $15.95 cloth. ISBN 1-920501-99-0. **Finster Frets.** Kent Baker. Illus. H. Werner Zimmermann. Oxford University, 1992. 32 pages, $7.95 paper. ISBN 0-19-540899-3.

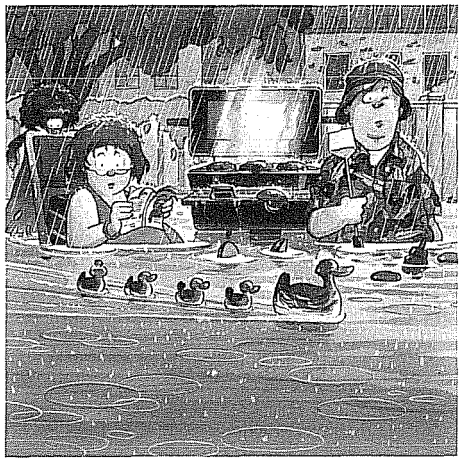
The boldly illustrated *Now You See Them, Now You Don't* contains an environmental message. Simon, "a famous hunter," is the quintessential Anglo-Saxon colonial man, complete with rifle and an ambition to increase his trophy collection. When he sets off for faraway lands, the animals prepare disguises with paint and strange poses. Simon stands on an elephant "rock," wanders beneath crocodile "trees," and amongst pink hippo/flamingoes. Conceding defeat, he returns home and the animals sing a ditty imploring hunters to bring cameras, not guns.

Simon is an anachronism; the story is about historical hunting rather than modern realities such as poaching or habitat destruction. A stocky, slightly ridiculous figure in shorts and pith helmet, Simon lacks any tracking skills or bush savvy; the animals are the superior intelligence in these pages. The book relies heavily on adult interpretation to explain its context. The environmental message would possess greater impact if death wasn't sanitized from the story; the dull-witted Simon is an implausible killer.

Mr. Patapoum's First Trip is also about man as explorer of exotic places, and is delightfully illustrated. Mr Patapoum, an anthropomorphized pig, offers assistance to a migrating duckling. Traversing forest, desert, water, and mountains, his expedition is joined by other animals. Changing terrain raises fears that the party can proceed no further, but the resourceful Patapoum invents vehicles from scraps: a boat, a desert jalopy, a flying machine. He retains his cheerfulness until the duckling is delivered and he can enjoy a tropical holiday and hero status.

Throughout the story, Patapoum is a persistent problem-solver. The only criticism is that gendered stereotypes of males as explorers and inventors get reinforced. A female pig, cast in Patapoum's role, would have added fresh perspective. However, the gendered stereotype is subverted by the nurturing care Patapoum extends to the duckling, and the fact that it is from compassion—not desire for fame or glory—that Patapoum undertakes his trek.

Unlike Patapoum, the human adults in *Wait and See* lack resourcefulness or imagination. Living with a daughter who controls meteorological changes, Olivia's parents are completely dependent on her to return their suburban environment to



From *Wait and See*. Illus. by Michael Martchenko

normal. While children cavort in a snowfall, the parents plead: "You have to get rid of this." Snow is replaced by rain, which adult neighbours seem no more equipped to cope with than do Olivia's parents. Dripping stodgily by the barbecue and reclining on a floating lawn chair, these adults are not adaptive.

Munsch's adults and children have difficulty finding an environment in which they can co-exist happily. His habitual use of "the father" and "the mother" reduces parents to generic adults and distances them from children. (In contrast, Olivia is never "the daughter.") This is definitely a child-disrupted, child-centred neighbourhood, with a generation gap which adults haven't the imagination or sense of fun to bridge.

Mrs. Ming, in comparison, is an approachable adult who empathises with young Jeremiah in *Sleep Tight, Mrs. Ming*. Dealing with the worn theme of bedtime fears, this story is harmoniously illustrated in soothing tones. The use of textual repetition constructs a framework of reassurance in the plot. Mrs. Ming, interrupted from her esoteric evening activities, is a creature of habit in Jeremiah's room. Each time he is disturbed by an enigmatic "something," Mrs. Ming responds formulaically: "If something is bothering Jeremiah please stop at once!"

Mrs. Ming is sympathetic and patient, both extraordinary and ordinary in her baggy pyjamas and slippers. When a thunderstorm frightens her, the reader realizes that even the most sane of adults is allowed a weakness. Mrs. Ming climbs into bed with Jeremiah and he comforts her in her own words: "Everything's all right now." And indeed it is, for Jeremiah and Mrs. Ming have a relationship based on a mutual empathy which transcends age differences.

Long Nellie uses a well-constructed plot and illustrations pulsing with life to repeat the theme of friendship between a boy and a woman. Nellie—a marginalized character who lives in a ramshackle trailer and scavenges in dumpsters—

arouses curiosity. Alone and shabby, she is obviously "other" to a middle-class, mainstream "us." Plastic windows mean that "neighbours couldn't see in. Long Nellie couldn't see out"—an effect both physical and symbolic. When Jeremy finds a stray cat he gives it to Nellie for he intuits that neither fit within middle-class constraints. The gift results in an opportunity for Jeremy to nurture Nellie with a fire, warm socks, and tea. He decides to bring glass to replace the plastic, an action symbolic of the fact that he and Nellie now "see" each other as real human beings.

Though it's pleasant to see a male child nurturing an older female, it's perhaps unfortunate that the stereotype of "us" improving life for "them" gets reinforced. A nice reversal of the social work theme would be to see Nellie helping the materially better-off boy. Perhaps the fact that she has demystified otherness for him is enough.

Like Nellie, Finster in *Finster Frets* is an eccentric adult, an old man who playfully and ridiculously explodes old men stereotypes. He not only has a sense of humour and a witty vocabulary, but also a spry wife who is devoted to him. No sitting in rocking chairs for this couple. When Finster awakes to find a pair of birds nesting in his hair, man and wife rocket through the countryside in their night clothes, their horse running flat out ahead of the wagon. Although this fails to dislodge the birds, Finster's wife, Holly Berry, has other ingenious ideas. When they too fail, Finster himself solves the problem. He reappraises the combined talents of himself and Holly Berry and realizes that he need never fret again. These are old people whom children would be delighted to encounter either in the pages of a book or in their neighbourhood, for, like children, Finster and Holly Berry have a well-honed sense of the ridiculous.

Troon Harrison *is a student at Trent University and the author of several picture books, including* The Long Weekend *(Harcourt Brace).*

THE CANADIANS: TOM LONGBOAT

The Canadians: Tom Longboat, Bruce Kidd, Ed. Cathleen Hoskins, Fitzhenry & Whiteside,1992. 80 pp., ISBN 0-88902-680-7.

An athlete who competed with distinction on the international stage, Tom Longboat was little understood at home. He was also a Native Canadian, and as such was popularly viewed through the biases of his contemporaries. Bruce Kidd tries to place Longboat's life into a more balanced cultural perspective for the juvenile reader. Kidd is a former Commonwealth and Olympic long distance runner who was named by the Council of Fire of the Iroquois Confederacy as an "Honorary Warrior and Runner of Messages." He currently teaches physical education at the University of Toronto. The author's life experiences focus his approach to Longboat's life story, with principal emphasis being placed on